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November 1902

The Romance of a Dead Letter.
Helen R. Edson.

A Human Loadstone.
Frederick Kingswinter.

The Czar's Mince Pies.
Sewell Ford.

The Apotheosis of Jay.
Roderick Hamilton.

An Official Dispatch.
Annette Kittredge.

5 CENTS

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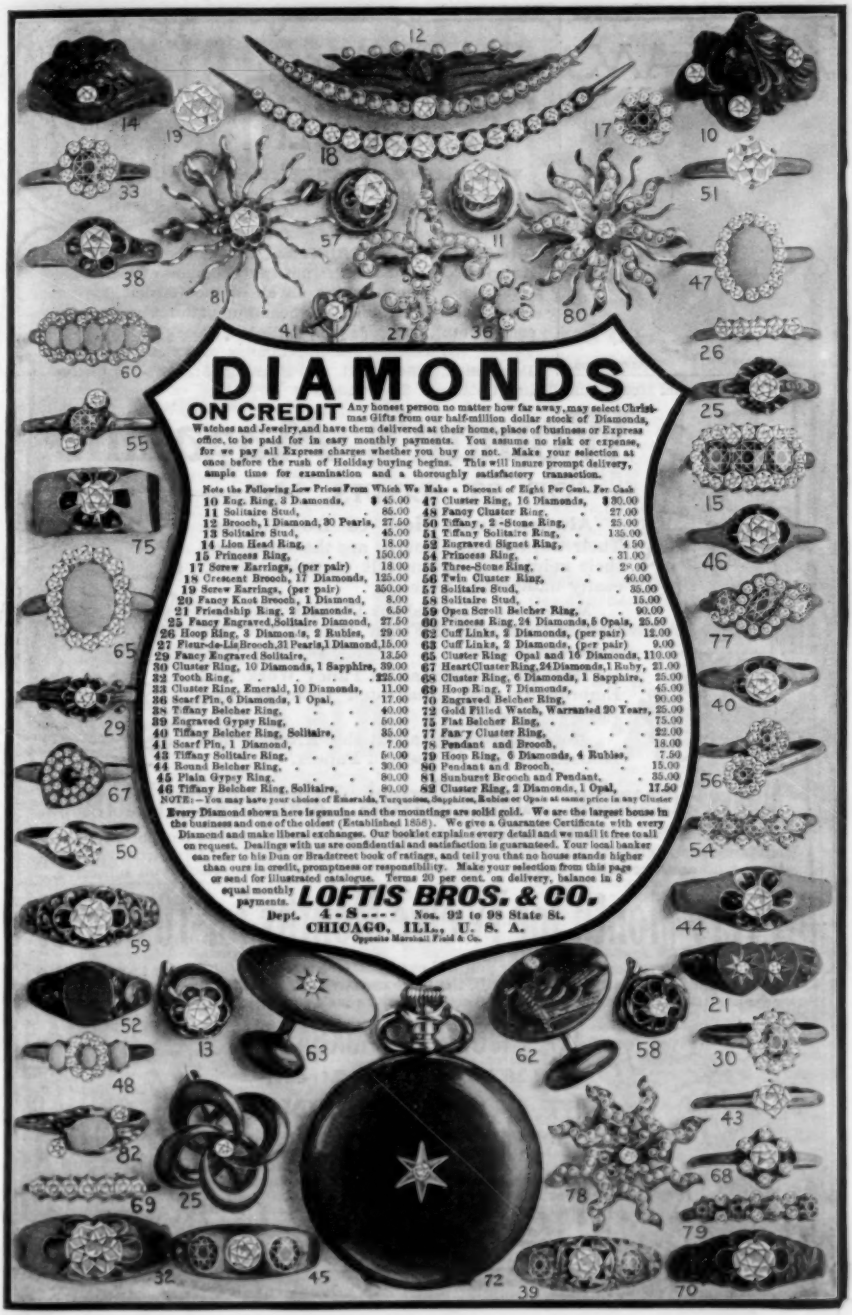

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The Romance of a Dead Letter.*

BY HELEN R. EDSON.

IT was something of a task to prepare the United States Post-office Exhibit for the Pan-American Exposition. To the collection of wax personages, model maps and other appliances which were made for the Centennial World's Fair, and exhibited at succeeding national functions, must be added a Cuban mail carrier, a Porto Rican with a donkey, done in wax fit for a cathedral's candles, and sundry new devices in the way of letter-bags and boxes.

As troublesome as any was the collection of Dead Letters. Those which had been used on similar occasions had either been destroyed or distributed in their allotted places to await their time for burning.

To Frederick Denny, one of the chief assistant clerks, was assigned the duty of selecting an attractive and suitable line of samples from that department. He rummaged boxes until he had a curious assortment — merchants' bills, invitations to dine, letters on many subjects, written on all colors and styles of paper, and a quantity of cheap jewelry. He sorted and arranged the packages, and then approached a booth where a woman sat opening letters

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and laying them in two piles — one of them small, composed of those whose signatures baffled her powers of divination, the other large, whose secrets were easily discovered.

The other booths were occupied by women similarly employed — some young, some middle-aged, but all aware of Mr. Denny's presence, and that affairs were veering slightly from their customary orbit. One glanced his way, and stealthily "fluffed" her wavy hair a trifle more. The others kept their eyes upon their work, but had learned the art of seeing without looking.

His stopping at that booth occasioned great surprise. Indeed, he was surprised himself. With all the others he was on terms of easy friendliness, and merry jest and banter when they chanced to meet outside the office. To Cynthia Crawford he had bowed and raised his hat — or opened a door if they arrived at the same time — but he had never exchanged a word with her beyond the strict requirements of the office routine.

One's first impression of Miss Crawford was that she had been seared by some fierce conflagration. Her face was colorless, her hair pale brown. Her office dress was of soft gray cloth, with white vest-front, collar and tie, always spotlessly fresh and white. The rest indulged in more or less of finery and color — she never varied from the gray and white. There were no rebellious locks, no fluttering ribbons or soft laces. On blustering mornings, when the other women rushed to the tiring-room to rearrange loose ends, Miss Crawford emerged from her close veil as trim and tidy as My Lady from her sedan-chair.

Possibly it was because she was so colorless, so neutral, enveloped in her own repressed personality, that he inclined toward her. He was in haste, and could ill afford time for quip and repartee with the bright-eyed women whom he knew. He was fatigued, and not at his best. He had come, annoyed and angry, from a bout with the janitor, who had allowed the gorgeous uniforms of some of the wax figures to be riddled by moths, and had neglected other work that had been entrusted to him. Thus it may well have been the instinctive turning of a worried man to the most restful, quiet woman near. She looked up with a faint surprise, when he dropped wearily into a chair opposite to her with a murmur of apology, and listened while he told his errand.

"I have nearly completed my collection for the 'Pan-American,' Miss Crawford, but it is a very uninteresting one, and needs to be somewhat relieved. Can you direct me to something that will be better worth showing? You have been here so long, you know," he pleaded, as an odd light flashed into her calm blue eyes.

"Something interesting?" she repeated, laying down the letter in her hand.

"Yes. There is always a crowd around the cases of Dead Letters, and the people will be disappointed if they are wholly commonplace."

A tiny red spot stained the whiteness of her cheek. She hesitated, bit her lip, and frankly met his gaze. "There is a letter, Mr. Denny, that has never seemed to me to be really 'dead.' It has been here for about eight years; but — well, I know you will think it is absurd, but I can't resist a premonition that it will yet be delivered to the right person."

Her voice was full of feeling. The tiny red spots changed to a lovely flush that overspread her cheeks. Her eyes were misty with pity for the letter that could not die.

Was this the "colorless Miss Crawford"? the graven image which glided to its place in the morning, toiled wordlessly all day and disappeared at night? It was a miracle. The statue had come to life. It was a woman, charming in her apotheosis! His own cheek felt a sudden answering glow, but he responded quietly: "That is the very letter I want, Miss Crawford. Perhaps its exhibition will lead to its discovery by the rightful owner. Can you direct me to it? I confess I want to see it, anyhow. It must be something out of the ordinary."

She crossed the room to the cases, drew an envelope from behind the neatly stacked files in a certain drawer, and gave it to him.

"I hid it when its time came to be burned," she confessed, like an honest child. "Read it, and tell me if *you* could let a thing like that be burned like a grocer's bill?"

He read it slowly. His eyes grew moist and tender. "Thank you!" he said quite simply. "You were right. That letter is not 'dead.'"

"Sometimes in the night, when I am alone at home, I fancy it is crying, and I long to comfort it and send it home!" she spoke im-

petuously, her habitual constraint vanishing in the warmth of his quick, unexpected sympathy.

"Trust me with it, then," he begged. "I hope I am as true a man as you are a woman. I will carry it with my personal belongings, and give it the best place in the exhibit. It shall not be my fault if the writer does not find out that it was never delivered, or if the person addressed never knows that it was written." He looked at the envelope. "It is easy to see that there was a blunder somewhere. It is dated 'May 3d,' and postmarked 'May 10th.' It must have lain in a servant's coat pocket for a week, or adhered to the side of a mail-box. That was too bad! But we'll do our best, Miss Crawford, to make up for the delay."

She clasped her hands. Her eyes glowed like stars. Her lips parted in a tremulous smile.

He bent slightly towards her. "Have I your permission to — report any interesting developments?"

She hesitated. The old constraint was coming back. "You may as well consent," he urged. "I don't believe I can refrain from letting you know it if anything really important happens to this letter. Besides, this is a species of partnership, and it would be unbusinesslike not to report results."

Again that rosy flush and charming smile. "I shall be very glad to hear from the letter," she replied, sitting at her table.

The pretty, unwonted play had not lacked curious spectators, though no word of the dialogue had reached their ears.

"Mr. Denny!" called a sprightly blonde, as the man went slowly past her booth. "Don't you want something extremely funny for your exhibit?"

He did, and the young woman produced for him a letter and a package — the former clever and piquant, presenting a shaving-set to the writer's young cousin. The razor was nicked like a rip-saw, the brush was a few broom-straws tied to a penholder, the soap was of the yellow laundry variety, the pad was of brown paper. He laughed at the grotesque outfit, thanked her gaily and passed out. At the top of the winding stair, he glanced back at the fair face framed in the pale brown hair, still stirred by the recent stress of feeling. "After all these years, I have seen her for the first time to-day!" he marvelled to himself.

The brief, business-like communication which he sent to Miss Crawford a week later was so clearly within the spirit of her permission that her strait notions of propriety suffered no shock. It announced that The Letter had been neatly framed, and had been placed in the showcase after everything else was in order, and the details of guards had begun their daily and nightly vigils. One would have thought it the Kohinoor diamond.

She replied briefly, in a quaint, graceful note, written in an exquisitely small clear hand, thanking him for his thoughtfulness, and expressing an unflagging faith that something would come of it.

Two weeks later, he wrote again, at greater length, reporting that The Letter was already attracting an auspicious degree of attention. Schoolgirls brought their mates to see it, dragging them ruthlessly past the Smithsonian marvels, the miniature lighthouses, the models of fortifications and war vessels. Lovers brought their sweethearts, to read and sigh, and slyly press each other's hands for joy that no black cloud of mystery overhung their hearts. Denny's was a rather daring letter; but she, remembering the instant sympathy in his dark eyes when she told him of The Letter, sent the friendliest little missive in return, so sweet and gracious that he treasured it in a very inner pocket, and thought it hard to wait another fortnight.

It was now barely three weeks since The Letter was taken from its hiding-place, but already Frederick Denny had written two letters to a lady with whom he had scarcely been on speaking terms till then, and the leaven of The Letter was working in unexpected places.

Sixty miles away, Miss Jane Locke sat in her class-room, conducting an exercise in English Composition. She had left the young ladies to the freedom of their own wills in the matter of subjects for their essays, and the result was an odd assortment: Spring; Patriotism; Poetry; The Influence of this or that obscure, abstract Something-or-other, about which schoolgirls know so much; and the teacher breathed a sigh of relief when a clever girl in the rear seat announced her title: "What I liked best at the Pan-American Exposition."

Here, at last, was something definite and practical. The girl

had made good use of eyes and ears during a short visit between Friday's and Monday's lessons; the list of things she liked was long, and each was outlined in a few clear, vivid sentences.

"It was a scene I never shall forget!" she declared. "But more than buildings, fountains, or even the wonderful electric lighting, I liked a Dead Letter in a showcase in the Government Building. It was in the dearest little hand, and had a border of round O's all around the margins. I'd give anything I possess if I could deliver that letter to the person to whom it was addressed! I copied it, thinking you might like to share it with me."

In the gnarly Apple-tree.
May third, Year of Our Love, One.

Dearest Prince Lightheart:

So much too good, and patient, and kind to me, who am so cross and naughty! Did not you know I did not mean a word of it? I did not! I—did—not! I started to climb down and run after you before you turned the corner of the hedge; but that Miss Collins came along, and she has such a gift for making something out of nothing! So I kept still. Your sorry letter came this morning. I had thought you would come yourself! I am answering it with tears. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry! I do love you! Never doubt me again, no matter what I say! Some of these O's are tears and some are kisses. Divide them as you will, they are all your own. And if you have forgiven me, come again to-morrow to the gnarly tree

and—JENSY.

The other girls had turned in their seats, the better to hear the reader, and so it befell that no one saw the teacher gasp at the opening sentence, turn deeply, darkly red, then white, and finally drop her head on her folded arms upon the desk. She had fainted quite away before the letter was half read through.

It was Friday. Monday's tasks were two days off, and Buffalo only sixty miles away.

At eight o'clock the next morning, Frederick Denny, having restored to their proper stations the waxen postmen and soldiers which the charwomen always left sociably awry, sat down to amuse himself with the morning papers until the throngs of sightseers should begin to arrive. At five minutes past eight, a woman entered from the Fisheries Building. She was tall and slender, and when she threw back her veil he perceived that her eyes were red and her cheeks mottled with much weeping. She glanced quickly from side to side, and presently catching sight of the showcase

rushed to it, gazed at The Letter, and leaned heavily against the thick glass, shaking with sobs.

A dullard must have divined the truth. He hastened to her side with offers of assistance. She summoned all her pride and went a few steps farther; but, blinded by her tears, stumbled against a Colonel of the Continental Army, buried her face on his papier-maché breast and gave vent to the pent-up agony of those bitter years of doubt. The glittering glass eyes in the blank wax face stared at the opposite wall above the poor bent head, and never changed expression; the stiff arms made no motion to enfold the convulsed form in a protecting clasp. The solitary living man among those bloodless images felt a wild impulse to shatter their doll-faces and tear the national uniform from their unchivalric backs. The effigy reeled on its wooden feet, and seemed about to fall. The man sprang nimbly to it and braced it from the rear with his own strong warm body till the paroxysm of grief had spent its fury.

When the lady raised her wet face from the gorgeous coat, he offered his arm and led her unresisting to the private office, back of the weather-beaten Overland Stage-coach. There were easy chairs, an open fire, books, paper, flowers and bright rugs, and floods of golden sunshine came in at the open window. She sank into one of the great chairs, pallid and weary, and began a stammering apology for her strange behavior; but he interrupted her with a simple, direct question.

"You wish to claim that framed letter, do you not?" She bowed. Her eyes were brimming.

"In that case, it will only be necessary for you to write for us the name of the person to whom it was originally addressed, and the Chief of this department will authorize me to deliver it to you."

Again she bowed. He drew a writing-table to her side, and she wrote: "Mr. George Blackburn, Middletown, New York." It was the name on the envelope that was hidden under the frame!

"Thank you," said he. "Please make yourself comfortable here. You will not be disturbed. Mr. Torrence will be here in about fifteen minutes, and we shall not need to detain you more than two minutes after he arrives."

He closed the door behind him, rubbed with a dry cloth the large damp spot on the Continental uniform and whirled the insensate thing to its own particular crack in the floor, then glanced at his watch and sat down with the paper again.

But though the headlines proclaimed that the world had misbehaved the day before in several extraordinary ways, he could not keep his thoughts on the printed page. He folded the sheet and sauntered to the glass case with a whimsical sense of bidding farewell to his charge. He read it through once more, throbbing with pity for the woman sitting in the office, and wondered how much it would have comforted *him* if he had learned that such a letter had gone astray. She must have waited long, and more than once, "in the gnarly tree," and wondered why, since she had made such full amends for her perversity, her lover never came. He smiled at the childish round O's in the margins, which stood for unkissed kisses and undried tears; and then he thought of the report he would send that night to his partner in this romantic business. Lest she should then dissolve the partnership, his letter should contain a question, but he would go himself to receive the answer. A thing so sacred must not risk losing its way, like this sweet, sorrowful confession, or be pilloried for idle eyes to gaze upon. It was now twenty minutes past eight. Chief Torrence, punctual as the clock, would appear in ten minutes, the lady would claim her property and go away. His meditations were interrupted by a tall, broad-shouldered gentleman, who inquired for Mr. Torrence.

"He will be here in ten minutes, sir," was the polite reply, and the clerk applied his handkerchief to the spot where his warm breath had made the plate glass dim.

The stranger's eyes mechanically followed the process. Then he stared at the framed letter for an instant, and seized in an iron grasp the hand that held the handkerchief.

"Where did you get that letter?" he demanded, glaring with astonishment and wrath.

"In the Dead Letter Office, of course!" gasped the other, jerking his hand away, and wondering if claimants of that ill-fated letter were dropping from the skies.

"Give it to me instantly!"

"I can't till Mr. Torrence tells me to."

"I'll smash the glass if you don't."

"One moment, please, Mr. — Mr. Blackburn!" begged Denny, struggling to repress a wild hurrah. "Answer one question before this goes any further. Are you married?"

"No. How could I be, when —" His voice broke and his eyes smarted with sudden tears.

"Well, good heavens! Pardon. I understand. And now, if you will step into our office for one minute, I'll bring that letter to you. Oh, yes, it is necessary, you'll have to sign a receipt, you know. Great Scott, man! Get in there quick, Mr. Torrence is almost here! Right that way, back of the old stage-coach. Just open the door, and walk in."

A Human Loadstone.*

BY FREDERICK KINGSWINTER.

SNAG'S invitation was what got him into trouble. The old side-wheeler *Ellen B.* had swung loose from the wharf at Montgomery, churned and thrashed about until, after reaching the bend where the stream is widest, she had made the turn, and then, with a rush and a clanging of bells, she came past the landing and hurried on her way.

It was about ten o'clock at night and, after the turn had been made, the roustabouts and deck hands all gathered on the forward deck and, as they fled past the lights of the city, their voices rose clear and high over the water as they sang "Hambone am sweet."

Snag was a new-comer, having been taken on at Mobile and he had made only the up-river trip. He said that he had recently worked with a construction gang when a railroad was building in Mississippi and, being a powerful man, he gave promise of becoming an excellent roustabout as soon as he could learn the names of the different landings and become acquainted with the peculiar language and terms used by the river hands.

Snag had been so named by one of the negroes because his upper front teeth were broken and he had a way of wrinkling his upper lip that exposed the snags constantly to view.

The hands had all been paid off at Montgomery and when the long bend in the river had been passed and there was no further danger of police interference, Snag thrust his hand into his pocket and produced a pair of dice. "Sposen us shoots some," he suggested.

The idea was possibly foremost in the minds of a number of the negroes, for they received his suggestion with remarks of approbation

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and in a few minutes a crap game was in full swing. The circle was formed around a lantern which had been placed on the deck and all eyes were centred on the rolling dice as the shooter rattled them out on the deck with husky prayers to "Little Joe," "Big Dick" or "Phœbe" as the particular numbers were needed to make the winning.

Snag sometimes lost and sometimes won, but the run of luck seemed to be with him and, as the night wore on, the wages of the other negroes were gradually gathered in by him. Suddenly as Snag made a throw, one of the negroes who had lost his all and was now a spectator merely through interest in the progress of the game, reached quickly for the dice.

"Le'me look at dem bones," he shouted. "Dem's horse dice."

Snag immediately made a grab for the dice, but he was too slow, and seeing serious trouble ahead, he plunged through the circle in an endeavor to reach the rail, where he might jump into the river and make his escape. There was a scuffle and a succession of oaths and blows when suddenly Snag staggered and fell to the deck with a groan. The others gathered round and held the lantern over his face.

"Dat nigger's dead sho," whispered one. "Better t'row him overbode an' dat quick."

"Naw," said another, "he's got seben dollars of my money. Git de money outen his pockets an' den t'row him overbode."

So one of them stooped over the prostrate form and the money of which Snag had robbed them was taken from his pockets. There was a little which had belonged to him, but the searcher cared to make no mistakes and took it all. Then, while the more fearful ones slunk away with quick-beating hearts, two others dragged the body to the rail with the intention of throwing it into the river as had been suggested.

"What's all the howl down there," shouted some one whose voice they instantly knew to be that of the Captain. As they heard the sound of his approaching steps, the two negroes who held the body at once jumped on the rail and sprang far out into the river, where they dived to escape the paddles.

Coming up with his lantern, the Captain found Snag lying in a heap near the edge of the deck where he had been dropped. He

pushed the body with his foot. "Hey, get up from there," he shouted, but the body only rolled over from the force of the kick and he saw turned up to him the bloody face of his new roustabout.

He went back to where the gang of negroes stood huddled together like sheep. "Who did that?" he asked fiercely. At first none of them answered, but at a second inquiry accompanied by a threat that he would get his shotgun and take them back to Montgomery unless they did their talking in a hurry, one of them cleared his throat and said in a husky voice: "Dunk an' Bat done it an' dey is done jumped in de river 'bout a mile back." "Why didn't you tell me?" he shouted. "Us heard 'm fightin' and den got skeered," was the mumbled reply.

The Captain ordered some of them to take the body and place it on a pile of sacks. He then threw water in Snag's face and tried to revive him by pouring whiskey down his throat, but finally gave it up. Snag seemed to be sleeping his last sleep.

At the next landing, known as Powell's Landing, the body was taken ashore and turned over to some negroes, with instructions to have a doctor to make an examination, as it had never grown cold nor stiff. There was a waving of lanterns, a few hoarse shouts as the lines were thrown out and the *Ellen B.* backed out into the stream and, turning her nose with the current, left her new roustabout in the hands of strangers.

The body was placed in a wagon and carried some three miles to the home of young Doctor Merrington. It was laid on a bed in a negro cabin and the examination began.

After washing away the blood, Doctor Merrington found a deep cut in the scalp and, on placing his fingers in it, he felt something hard and sharp. A closer examination revealed a piece of steel which had been driven into the skull and which had broken short off. It was only after numerous attempts that he finally secured a hold on it with a strong pair of forceps and drew it out. It was the broken end of a knife blade with the point missing and a couple of gaps in the edge. The doctor dressed the wound and finally, after being worked on for a long time, Snag came to life just as day was breaking, and mumbled incoherently.

It was a week before the negro was able to get out of the cabin

and creep about the yard. He had grown thin and was weak and nervous, and though another week brought back some of his strength and he took on a little flesh, his nervousness seemed to increase rather than diminish. It was only when he was away from the cabin and sitting alone that his nervousness left him and he appeared at ease. Doctor Merrington continued to have him fed from his kitchen until one day he asked the negro when he proposed to go to work or go away. Snag was sitting on a stick of wood under an old oak in front of the Merrington home when the doctor rode up. At the near approach of the horse, Snag rose and stood trembling and swallowing as with fear.

"What is the matter with you, anyway?" asked the doctor. "You act as though you were afraid of me."

"Naw, sir," the negro replied. "I dunno what's de matter wid me; I spec I'm hoodooed."

The cotton-picking season was coming on and Doctor Merrington let the negro stay, intending to put him to work in the field as soon as the cotton should begin to open. In the meantime Snag did but little work. Cutting wood made him sick and weak and once he fainted when he was given hammer and nails and set to work to repair the barn. He moved out of the cabin which had been assigned to him and set up a tent of old sacks and a piece of ragged oil cloth. Here he seemed to be perfectly happy and began to grow stouter and stronger.

When cotton began to open, Snag was sent to the field and no negro on the place picked more than he did. He seemed both quick and willing and was often heard to sing as he went to the field to begin his day's work.

One day Doctor Merrington rode out to watch the picking. He tied his horse under the shade of a tree and walked to a row where Snag had just begun. The negro eyed him uneasily, but went on with his work. The doctor walked along the rows, examining the cotton bolls, the stalks and the leaves, until the two had gone half way across the field. Suddenly Snag stopped picking and, after walking round in a half circle, began to pick again on the same row about thirty feet from where he had left off. The doctor noticed his action and asked the reason for it. The negro had skipped about the same distance on several rows and to the re-

peated query as to why he had done so, he replied in a husky voice: "I'll pick dat later."

"No, you won't," said the doctor. "You'll pick it right now."

"I can't pick dat place," moaned the negro in a pitiful voice.

"What's the matter with the place?"

"I dunno, sir, but it makes me sick ter try ter pick dat place, an' I can't pick it. It makes me crazy."

"Yes, you can pick it, and you'll pick it right now," said the doctor in an angry voice. He was tired of the notions of this negro whose life he had saved, and whom he had fed for so long, and who had now grown so particular and fastidious that he had become the chooser of his own work. It was a little too much.

"I'll die befo' I'll pick it," whimpered Snag. "Hit'll kill me ter pick dat place."

It all seemed so silly and outrageous that the doctor stepped forward as though to strike him with his riding whip. Snag darted out of reach, but as he came to the centre of the unpicked place, he stumbled over a cotton stalk and fell backward with a scream.

"Hit's in de groun'," he shouted, "hit's in de groun'." And scrambling to his feet, he staggered away holding his hands to his head and uttering weak yelps of pain. Across the field he went, still yelping, and finally he climbed over the worm fence at the edge of the woods and disappeared from view.

Doctor Merrington stood gazing after him in amazement. He examined the place where Snag had fallen, but except for the broken cotton stalks, it did not appear different from the rest of the field.

Young Doctor Merrington was in trouble. In the first place, he was in love with Eleanor McLeod, and while he felt that her love for him should bring him a world of happiness, it nevertheless made his troubles seem so much greater that he almost despaired. His father had died two years before, leaving him with an education and a profession, a plantation that was heavily mortgaged, and an ungathered crop on which there were large liens for advances. He had felt at first that he could work the place out of debt and thus save the old home, but two poor crops, together with low-priced cotton, had only sunk it deeper. He would have abandoned the attempt after that had it not been that he had assumed a

greater part of the indebtedness in his own name while trying to wipe out his father's losses.

So he sat that night on his front gallery, puffing at his pipe, dreaming of Eleanor and feeling utterly miserable. The crop was going to be short again and there seemed no hope. He got up and walked restlessly about the yard under the giant oaks until he stood at last looking out across the fields of cotton on which the harvest moon was shining brightly.

He thought of the incident of that day when Snag had run away and a sudden desire seized him to walk over and look at the spot. It all seemed a puzzle to him and when he again came to the place he saw only the broken stalks where the negro had fallen. He stood for some time wondering over it all, and the negro's cry of pain: "Hit's in de groun', hit's in de groun'," kept ringing in his ears.

A sudden idea came to him. "I'll dig," he said to himself, "and see what is in the ground, if anything." He started toward the house, but stopped suddenly almost with shame. "Suppose some one should see me," he thought, "they would think that I am a fool. I'll dig, anyway," he muttered as he started again for the house, "and find out what the negro's hoodoo is."

In a little while he had returned to the field and, after digging up a few cotton stalks, he sank the spade into the soft earth. His dog stood eyeing him a moment and then came up and sniffed at the hole suspiciously. After the usual mind of dogs, he dreamed only of animals to be dug up, and his master had to push him away several times as he proceeded with the digging. The dog persisted in forcing his way into the hole, and it was only a well-administered kick that made him withdraw and lie down to watch.

When he had dug about two feet, the spade struck something metallic and as a new idea shot into his brain, a chill ran over him. "Suppose there should be money buried here," he thought, and he trembled with excitement as the spade again clicked against the metallic body. He began to dig with almost feverish haste and had soon unearthed the edge of an iron pot. In a few more minutes the pot had been dug out, and after the earth which lay on top had been removed, a mass of gold and silver coins shim-

mered before him in the moonlight. He sank back weakly and gazed at it with incredulous eyes. It came upon him almost like a blow and he could hardly believe but that it was all a dream. Finally, he arose and looked carefully over the field. No one was near, and so he stooped and filled his pockets until they could hold no more. Returning hurriedly to the house, he secured a meal sack and, after covering up the hole, he replanted the cotton stalks and carried the coin to his room, where he placed it in his trunk. The pot he carried to a creek near by and dropped it into a deep hole. The dog followed him for awhile and then returned to the field, where he continued to dig up the fresh earth, sniffing and whining disconsolately.

All night long a light burned in Doctor Merrington's room and, when daylight came, he threw open the blinds and stood at the window, haggard and pale, but with a gleam of happiness in his eyes as he gazed out on his fields and knew that they were saved. He had fourteen thousand dollars, nearly all in gold coins of a mintage earlier than 1860.

That day the negroes who picked in the fields reported that dogs had been digging holes in the ground and "had tore up de cotton plum scandalous." "Who cares for a little cotton," he said. "Let the dogs alone." They looked at him with wondering eyes. He of all men had been most particular that every pound of cotton that his fields could produce should be picked and accounted for. They wondered, but said nothing.

That afternoon Snag was found wandering about in a swamp and was brought home. He was delirious and moaned unceasingly. Doctor Merrington worked hard with him for some days, but nothing could break his fever and at last he died.

The negro's cry: "Hit's in de groun'," had been ringing in Doctor Merrington's ears until it had completely unnerved him, for he felt that in some way that pot of gold had driven the negro mad, but how this could be or how the negro could know anything about it was utterly beyond him.

After Snag died, Dr. Merrington remembered the old wound and examined the place. It had long since healed and only a broad scar remained. He decided to cut into the head and see how the bone had behaved. It had joined as well as could be

expected, and so he sawed through, and on the brain he found inflammation. This could only have been recent, for otherwise the negro would have died long before and would have been delirious from the very beginning. Into this affected part he thrust a probe, and when he drew it out he noticed that there was something sticking to it. He removed it and found that it was the missing knife point. "That killed him," he was thinking. "But I don't see what it had to do with the pot of gold in the ground. Well, it's beyond me," he said at last as he laid down the bit of steel and dropped his probe beside it. Then something happened that made his eyes start, and he stared at the knife point as it hugged close to the probe. He thought of the curious actions of the negro from the time when he had been struck in the head on the down-stream trip of the *Ellen B.;* of his nervousness and seeming inability to do certain kinds of work, claiming that it made him sick and crazy, and of his seeming pain on occasions when Snag himself could give no reason for it.

He pulled the bit of steel from the probe, dropped it on the table and held the instrument near it. It shot quickly to the probe and snuggled tightly to it again. The mystery was solved, but a great wonder still remained, and Doctor Merrington sat gazing at it for a long time.

"It's magnetized," he murmured finally, "and the — pot — was — iron."

The Czar's Mince Pies.*

BY SEWELL FORD.

IT was all quite abrupt. One day there had been Miss Barbara Staples contentedly sewing just where she had sat and sewed at intervals for fifteen years. On the swing shelf in the cellar there had been the pies — deep-pan pies, robust, plethoric, brown crusted, glorious to the eye and enticing to the palate.

Next day they were gone. Miss Barbara was gone, the pies were gone. No, the cat had not eaten the pies. The cat would have left the plates. From Miss Barbara there had been no word of farewell, no note of explanation. It must have been that she had risen early, packed an extension hand satchel, walked four miles to the station and taken the early train. But the pies? It was not likely that they had evaporated, pans and all. It was more reasonable to suppose they had gone in the satchel.

Barton Centre, noting the absence of Miss Barbara — "Gritty" she was more commonly called — was mildly curious. Barton Centre rather expected the unconventional from "Gritty" Staples. There was cause for this. Miss Staples had not lived her thirty-five years passively. Her nickname had not come without reason. But when Mrs. Mary Hallowell, "Gritty's" married sister, had admitted Barbara's disappearance and given her explanation of it, the mild curiosity of Barton Centre burned hot with interest.

"All I know about it," declared Mrs. Hallowell, "is what Gritty said when we finished making the mincemeat. It was a good lot, if I do say it. We both said so at the time. There was just enough apple to make it moist, just enough suet to make it rich, just enough cider to make it tart and just enough spices to

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season it right. Gritty tasted and said it was good enough for anybody in the world to eat. I tasted and said it was as good mincemeat as I'd ever put tongue to. At this Gritty spoke up kind of sharp. 'But *isn't* it good enough for anybody in the *world?*'

"'Well,' says I, 'I shouldn't want to go so far as that. Some folks are mighty particular about pies.'

"'Who, for instance?' says Gritty.

"'Well,' says I, 'there's the Czar of Russia.' Of course I was only joking, but Gritty never did have a sense of humor. She stood there holding the mixing spoon for a minute or so, and then she says, kind of decided like: 'I just guess,' said she, 'if the Czar of Russia could taste one of our mince pies, he would say he never eat anything better in his life.' Then we went ahead and poured the mincemeat into the crock, and nothing more was said for half an hour, — Gritty isn't much of a talker, you know, — but finally she came out with, 'Anyway, we'll just see,' as if we had been talking right along. Next day she made them two deep-pan pies and set 'em away to cool. In the morning she was gone. Now that's all I know about it."

Barton Centre, however, worked itself into a fine fury of excitement. It laid hold of the bare, unbudded facts and sprouted a marvellous foliage of fancy. "Gritty" Staples had disappeared. As she had neither relatives nor friends in any other part of the country, it was not likely that she had gone on a visit. Then where *had* she gone? And why? Had anything happened to her? If so, what? And how? Barton Centre had much leisure to devote to discussion of these problems and, so far as words went, did them full justice.

Before the end of the week searching parties went through the woods. The mill pond was dragged. The searchers found more or less hickory nuts which the squirrels had not yet gathered; the drag-net party brought to light the rear wheels of Jeff Thornton's old buggy which the boys had run into the pond three summers before.

Next Mr. "Lank" Hallowell was urged to action. At almost any time of the day one or two persons might have been seen in his tin shop, advising him as to what he ought to do in this matter

of his lost sister-in-law. Some thought he should advertise in the Boston papers, others that he should send "Gritty's" description to chiefs of police all over the country. Silas Barker was for offering a $500 reward, and Lem Andrews thought detectives should be engaged.

"Lank" Hallowell continued to mend leaky boilers and to hammer away at stove-pipe joints. "It does seem to me that something ought to be done," said he, "but Mary, she won't listen to it. The Stapleses have always been mighty good folks, but most of them have had queer notions. Mary isn't quite so queer as Gritty, but she has her ideas. 'Wherever Gritty's gone, she went of her own notion,' says she, 'and I guess she's old enough to look out for herself.' No, Mary isn't worrying any. She don't seem to care to talk much about Gritty's going off, though, so I wouldn't say anything to her about it if I was you."

The Barton Centre folks took this advice, but they talked enough among themselves to make up for what they did not say to Mrs. Hallowell. "Gritty" Staples had lived among them more or less quietly all her life. They expected her to continue to do so to the end. True, she had occasionally done some unexpected things — embraced Christian Science, had herself elected a member of the School Committee, called the Selectmen "a pack of old fogies" in open town meeting, and the like — but never had she done anything so radical as to disappear with two mince pies, and her townspeople were penetrated by a just indignation.

An active, aggressive, energetic person was "Gritty" Staples — slim of figure, not wholly unattractive as to face and possessing a self-sufficient, confident air that seemed to challenge criticism. She talked but little, never about herself, her ills, her joys, her plans. She went out to do days' sewing, and, when not thus engaged, made her home at the Hallowells'. It was believed that she had money in the bank. That she had never married was no mystery. The young men of Barton Centre were afraid of her, although none would admit as much.

It was just before Thanksgiving when "Gritty" and the pies disappeared, but it was long after New Year's before the daily question in Barton Centre ceased to be, "Wonder if any one's heard from Gritty Staples?" Even after that the query came up at

all social gatherings and the matter was threshed out from beginning to end.

Just about the time of the big snowfall on Washington's Birthday waning interest in the affair was once more aroused. A stranger drove over from the station in a cutter and asked the way to "Mr. Melancthon Hallowell's place of business."

"Oh, you want to find Lank's tin shop, eh?" responded Silas Barker. "It's just beyond the post-office."

The stranger wore a silk hat and a fur-trimmed overcoat, so he must have come from New York or from Boston, at least. He remained with "Lank" for half an hour and then drove back to the station. He was not out of the village before nine persons, each with a different excuse, found their way into the tin shop. But "Lank" had nothing to communicate. All agreed, however, that he seemed worried. No one doubted that the stranger's visit had to do with the disappearance of "Gritty." Several times during the catechism which followed did "Lank" appear to be on the point of weakening and telling his neighbors all about it, yet on each occasion he had refrained. But the next day, after he had talked it over with Mrs. Hallowell, his jaws were set resolutely. Not for a fortnight did Barton Centre despairingly settle down off its tip-toes.

A month went by, two months. Then, one day early in May, came a great stir. Jeff Thornton, who kept the livery stable, got a telegram from Boston ordering him to meet a special train at 3.15 P. M. with an open carriage and four horses. Jeff let down the cracked leather top of his old hack, borrowed a horse, spliced his reins and drove away to the railroad station so full of importance and excitement that his face fairly shone from redness. At least a third of Barton Centre accompanied him. Another third had gone before.

The station agent was mystified and disturbed. But his professional instincts led him to conceal these emotions beneath an official calm.

"Yes, sir, special train's due at 3.15. She's to take a siding and then follow the 3.25 back into Boston. Them's the orders." Such was the Delphic utterance that veiled an almost hysterical excitement.

A special train coming to Crossway Station! It was almost unheard of. Only once, and then when a President had made a New England tour, had such a thing occurred. And this special was to stop! Hence, it carried some one whose destination was Barton Centre, for there was Jeff Thornton and there was his rig. Barton Centre lined up along the track and strained its eyes Bostonwards.

At last it came. Tearing down the line was an engine, a baggage car and — yes, it was a Pullman. With a fine hissing of air brakes the special drew up at Crossway Station. First appeared the conductor at one end. Off the other swung a colored porter, car step in hand. Next appeared a personage. He was tall, dark, whiskered and important. He wore a strange and resplendent uniform. There was much gold lace and many shiny buttons about it. Stepping out on the platform he looked inquiringly around until his eye caught Jeff Thornton's rig. Jeff waved his whip invitingly and motioned to the open carriage door.

The personage raised his eyebrows, bowed and re-entered the car. In a moment the colored porter brought out an extension grip, half covered with foreign-looking labels, and handed it reverently to Jeff.

Then the personage reappeared, backing deferentially. Lastly, looking as unconcerned as if she had been stepping out of a carryall instead of a special train, came "Gritty" Staples. Ignoring the proffered hand of the personage, she walked down the car steps, crossed the platform and said to Jeff, "Have you got my satchel there, Jeff?"

The astonished Mr. Thornton tried to reply, gasped once or twice and ended by holding up the article in question.

"Oh, all right," said "Gritty." Then she allowed herself to be helped into the carriage, permitted the uniformed personage to raise her hand to his whiskered lips, and was driven to Barton Centre and to the home of her sister. To such a pitch had popular interest in its heroine risen that not even the station master was subsequently able to recall what became of her hirsute escort or the phenomenal "special."

In a semi-official statement Mrs. Hallowell later gave Barton Centre as much of the story as it was evident she meant to give.

"It was just as I thought at the time," thus ran the statement. "Barbara thought she would like to have the Czar try her mince pies, so she went to Russia and took a couple of them along with her. He did like the pies, too. Barbara expected he would."

You may well imagine that Barton Centre was entirely and unanimously dissatisfied with this meagre announcement. Particulars, details, were wanted. How had she travelled to Russia? How had she managed to see the Czar? What was the reason for her spectacular homecoming? Who was the whiskered personage? Yet nothing more would Mrs. Hallowell say, and "Gritty," who was said to be resting after her long trip, was not to be seen. As "Lank" had admitted, the Stapleses always did have queer notions. Keeping one's business to one's self seemed to be among them.

If Barton Centre's curiosity had been stirred by the disappearance of "Gritty" Staples, the manner of her return caused it to reach a stage where it might very properly have been said to have seethed. Anyway, that word is as good as another. None in the dictionary could have done full justice.

This seething process continued for a full week and then, from quite an unexpected source, came that by which it was allayed. Silas Barker's eldest boy, who was a clerk in the Pension Department at Washington, was taken sick and sent to a hospital there. Mr. Barker, on going to see him, found his son getting better. Also he made the acquaintance of young Mr. Barker's most intimate friend.

"From Barton Centre, eh?" said the intimate friend of young Mr. Barker. "Why, that's where that Barbara Staples lives, isn't it? Jim, I had forgotten that was your town."

The elder Mr. Barker, his eyes shining with aroused interest, responded that Miss Barbara Staples was a resident of Barton Centre, and he added the tentative suggestion that she was a remarkable woman.

"I should say so," said the intimate friend of the younger Barker. "She's the woman whose record a friend of mine in the Secret Service was sent to look up last winter."

"The man in the fur-trimmed overcoat," whispered Mr. Barker to himself. Aloud he said, "Yes?"

"Queer case that, eh? But I suppose you've written your son all about it."

"No," said the elder Mr. Barker, "I haven't told Jim a word yet. You tell him."

"Why," thus began the intimate friend, "it seems that this Miss Staples showed up at the American embassy in St. Petersburg along last December and demanded an interview with the Czar. Of course the clerks and attachés thought her crazy. They tried to humor her and put her off so as to keep her out of trouble. But that game didn't work. She wouldn't be fooled — just hung around the embassy from morning until night, and at last they had to let her see the Ambassador himself.

"She told the Ambassador that she had come all the way from Barton Centre with two mince pies for the Czar and that she proposed to give them to him in person. More than that, she wanted to see him again, to find out how he liked the pies.

"Well, sir, she talked so straight and seemed so dead in earnest that the Ambassador had to promise that he would try and arrange an audience for her. His idea was to keep her waiting until she got tired and went home. But there was no tire out to her. She kept at him, day in and day out, until he finally did lay the case before the Grand Duke of Something-or-Other, who has charge of the Czar's household. The Grand Duke told the Ambassador to send him full particulars about the woman, so the State Department was cabled for information. The Secretary sent out my friend and he found that in Barton Centre she was O. K.

"When the Grand Duke got the report it seems that he told the Emperor, by way of a joke, about the woman who had brought him two mince pies from America. The Czar laughed and said he would see the woman and accept her pies. And he did. She had a private audience in the Winter Palace and she gave her pies to the Czar with her own hands. I suppose they tested them, and when he found the pies were not poisoned, the Czar tried a piece. At least, they say he did. Anyway, he sent for Miss Staples again, thanked her for the pies and told her, if she ever came to St. Petersburg again, to bring him some more. When she left for home she carried a letter to the Russian consul in Boston, and I understand that they sent her out where she lived in a special

train, with a chargé d'affaires as an escort, and all in grand style."

"Indeed they did," said Mr. Silas Barker, who could hardly get back to Barton Centre quickly enough with his news.

"But whatever possessed her to do it?" asked Barton Centre. It asked in vain, for those who know Miss Staples best could not believe that she had planned for the result which the papers thus advertised:

THE IMPERIAL MINCEMEAT COMPANY

PIE MAKERS TO THE CZAR

(BY APPOINTMENT)

REMEMBER, Imperial Mincemeat is sold in glass jars, each containing one full pound of the same delicious mincemeat that charmed His Majesty, Nicholas II., Czar of Russia. It is made under the personal direction of Miss Barbara Staples, Queen of New England's pastry cooks and official pie maker, by Imperial appointment, to the Great White Czar. Be sure that a fac-simile of her signature appears on each label.

"And they say," declares Silas Barker, "that Gritty gets five thousand dollars a year, just for the use of her name. For queer notions and dum luck them Stapleses do beat the Dutch, don't they?"

The Apotheosis of Jay.*

BY RODERICK HAMILTON.

N the early days of reconstruction, nestling in the edge of a primeval forest of oak, elm and stately beeches — among the bluebells, ferns and may-blossoms, where the blue-jay and the bobolink, the linnet and the oriole twittered their love songs through the dreamy vernal sunshine to the bass note of the bullfrog and the tattoo of the woodpecker; where the clear, green waters of the run glanced and sparkled in the sunlight or peered inquisitively among the forest shadows — sprawled the little old village of Jay, scarce larger than its feathered sponsor, and long since smoothed off the map, a mere momentary ripple. Indeed, even in its heyday, it was barely saved from the ignominious cognomen of "cross-roads" by the one decrepit, ramshackle affair which served the first pioneers as postoffice, depot of supplies and loafing ground, the daily Mecca where they lounged in for the chance newspaper, or news from the adjacent county seat, or for the unexpected letter, though the mail coach passed through the place but twice a week.

For, deprived as they were of other rendezvous for the interchange of neighborhood amenities, or opportunity to lay cunning foundation for the periodical swapping of horse-flesh (the sole form of game of chance which their primitive civilization afforded), Pierson's store furnished a restful haven to the rustic lords of the soil, where it was their wont to recount marvellous chronicles of youthful prowess in wrestling match or among the fair, punctuated by frequent amber-colored libations to the Goddess Nicotine.

There were evil-minded individuals who insinuated that the attraction at Pierson's was contained in sundry innocuous-looking

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bottles labelled "extracts," and dark whisperings were indulged in that, at the next quarterly session, Pierson was to be "churched" for infractions of the statute framed in the interests of sobriety. Whatever grounds there may have been for these grave suspicions, the consumption of flavoring extracts and sarsaparilla was certainly out of due proportion to the population and the homely cuisine of pork and corn dodgers. Old Kelley winked knowingly when the subject was discussed in bated tones, though why there should be this ostentatious display of secrecy is difficult of explanation, for the veriest child in the countryside knew the road as the crow flies to the shadowy grotto beneath a ledge of limestone cliffs where the hoary sinner operated his illicit still, and impartially dispensed the potent product of his vineyard, the poor old beggar's one pitiful attempt at industry, though, with that species of honor which obtains among the pirates of the plains, it would have fared ill with any Judas among them whom cupidity might tempt to reveal the secret to the much-hated "revenue."

Despite all its frantic efforts for the coveted prize, Jay was destined never to boast of a railroad. Nevertheless, it was the proud possessor of a feud, indigenous to the fertile soil of the Old Dominion and transplanted in full vigor to this "Little Virginny," as it was called, on the hither bank of the Mississippi — a cruel family quarrel, for generations handed down, a gory heirloom, along with the dusky human chattels which constituted the principal wealth of the family in the good old days "befo' the wah, sah." That it had been perpetuated so long conveyed no invidious imputation against the marksmanship of the partisans, but was mainly attributable to the industrious propagation of the species which characterized the whole Brent brood.

Memory failed to recount how the trouble had its incipiency. Doubtless it was some quarrel about horse-flesh, for which the whole family cherished the true Southron's passion, or perhaps their political aspirations had run counter. However, the elder Bill had incurred afresh the enmity of his family when he yielded to the pleadings of his heart and intermarried with the enemy, and this new access of hatred gathered force and bitterness with the succeeding years.

The war, with grim impartiality, ruined both families by the

stroke of the martyr's pen. Kenner gathered together the shattered remnants of his former state, including one or two favorite racers which Burbridge had overlooked in his career of devastation, bade adieu to his boyhood home, and sought a haven in the budding West. With the unaccountable perversity which man shares with a certain strong-minded quadruped, Bill also migrated, and took up a homestead adjoining the rich tract of timber which the sagacious eye of his brother had chosen as the foundation of future wealth.

The quarrel took fresh root, but smouldered sullenly, for the stern frontier laws frowned on rifle practice at human targets, save during the intermittent forays of the fast-disappearing race, and nebulous legends of rigorous applications of lynch law for a time inspired these sons of Cain with some degree of awe. Then, too, all their energies were bent to subduing the soil for the support of their young families, a task by no means easy in the days of the early settler. Hence it was that no actual fatalities had occurred since the exodus, though every man carried his gun close at hand, in the field, at Pierson's, or to meeting, in which their rigid Methodist upbringing saw no inconsistency. Only the occasional disappearance of the blooded stock which roamed the woods attested to the deadly spite which smouldered, yet lived, and young Bill was known to have called the doctor for some mysterious ailment the exact nature of which professional etiquette forbade the latter to disclose — only an eloquent wink hinting at a skirmish — and it was observed with satisfaction that, after emerging from his seclusion, Bill limped for weeks.

There was also a village idiot, though Jay was not unique in this respect, for every backwoods hamlet of any pretensions could boast of at least one witless citizen, with aspirants on waiting orders. Silly Abe's chief difficulty lay in an unwise choice of parents, and he knew perhaps less than the forlorn dog prowling fondly at his heels. Nevertheless, the poor fool was harmless, serving as a convenient butt for the diversion of the villagers, in whose homes he helped to relieve life's colorless monotony with his grotesque antics.

With the impartial zeal for learning which characterized these rugged pioneers, Abe was sent to school in the little log fountain

of knowledge where future Solons learned their alphabet; but, after frightening the school-mistress into fits by sundry puerile evidences of admiration — his nearest approach to claims of manhood — the school committee gave up the experiment, and Abe was free to roam the woods or to whimper unavailingly at the pranks of his fellows.

Here Cupid reappeared upon the scene, not content with the result of his earlier meddlings. Young Bill and old Kenner's Mary fell victims to a deep mutual infatuation, but, whether out of commiseration for love's dream, or of wholesome reverence for Bill's well-known fistic prowess, no one had the temerity to betray them to the belligerents.

The entanglement had its incipiency when, as mere children in pinafore and roundabout, for some childish misdemeanor they had been simultaneously summoned to the tribunal of mild malefactors and, side by side, among divers other tow-headed, whitey-eyed scions of the Brent tribe, in the awful publicity of the teacher's rostrum, were condemned to learn their lessons from the same book, amid the titters of the school.

Here frizzly Bill first experienced the tremulous rapture of a lover, while Mary shyly stole a surreptitious glance in admiration of the crinkly adornment of Bill's handsome head, and the maiden heart was hers no longer.

The attachment deepened as the weeks went on, by means of ardent messages filibustered back and forth across the broad aisle wherewith the prim conventions of our forefathers hedged about the sexes, or was fanned into a gentle glow by stolen glances from behind the friendly expanse of the blue-backed geography. Moreover, with deep cunning, Bill contrived certain infractions of discipline whereof the penalty was a seat among the girls, but the punishment proved inadequate as a corrective, and had the effect of aggravating the boy's misdemeanors so alarmingly that the teacher's heart was sorely troubled, until an intercepted glance from the enamored Bill at the demure object of his affections shed light upon the situation — whereupon Bill's cup of bliss was cruelly withdrawn.

Bill's quick eye, rendered more alert by the inspiration of love, was the first to spy out the hidden places where the early spring

flowers pierced the moist brown turf, where the bluebell shed its fragrance in richest profusion, or the sunny slope where the May-apple ripened soonest; and it was his hand that gathered the first blushing harvest of luscious woodland strawberries and presented them, love's votive offering, to Mary.

None but Bill's hand could send the grape-vine swing so far out over the creek, or so unerringly guide his lady love in the van of the ice carnival on the frozen pond; and at last it became more or less gracefully accepted among the rivals for her favor, through the medium of sundry trouncings right lustily administered, that Bill and Mary were pledged to make life's pilgrimage together, despite all feudal conventions and precedents.

Little recked he of the cudgellings tremblingly administered by the terrified school-mistress, nor demurred instant obedience to her timid command to remove the thick homespun coat for the more effective infliction of the corrective rod, the penalty for a broken law unavailingly directed against the pugilistic encounters which lent piquancy to the tedium of the three R's. Perhaps Bill reflected that his executioner was of the same gentle order of beings as Mary; and he felt no shame, but rather a species of elation that the sorrowful eyes of the latter witnessed his martyrdom.

"Ah cu'd 'a chawed huh at wun bite," Bill relaxed his dignity sufficiently to enunciate, when one freckle-faced imp more fleet of foot than his fellows, from a salutary aloofness, made slighting allusion to that worthy's latest drubbing. "Ah don't fight wimmen, nohow. Cowa'hds and brewts fight the wimmen folks," chivalrously concluded this knight of the Old Dominion.

At length, the ardent young fellow wrung from his cousin a reluctant promise to run away to Missouri, the Gretna Green of early days, when the attainment of her sixteenth birthday should remove the fear of the State's prison from before his eyes, the penalty for abduction which sagacious Solons, mindful of their own youth, had framed as a deterrent of elopements; and though it is true he repented his unfilial conduct for the brief moment when, at the well-worn penitent form, he got religion under the sulphurous thunders of Brother Edwards's grim theology, love soon gained the ascendancy, and his remorse proved evanescent as the morning dew. So, in the interim of his bucolic labors, Bill ratified his ver-

bal promise over and over again in his crude scrawl, deposited in a deserted bird's nest in the hedge, where the farms abutted.

In the summer days, Bill trailed patiently back and forth across the sprouting fields behind his sire's snuff-colored mules, pausing now and then to rear with rude art the grotesque effigy with which to scare away the sable corn pilferers following silently behind; or, while he "spelled" his team, indulged in golden dreams, wherein the central figure was his cousin's winsome face; and Mary went to school, or served as upper nurse to the brood of younger brothers and sisters through their juvenile ills; or, at her loom in the shadow of the morning-glories, told off her daily stint, weaving into the stout homespun bright strands the exact color of Bill's handsome locks; sweet picture of a home where love should sit enshrined, and cruel family differences should be forgotten.

A quick rifle shot put an end to their reveries, and their fair castles were rudely shattered. Old Kenner was found one day by a passer-by apparently dead, the blood oozing from an ugly bullet wound in the head, and the elder Bill bent grimly over the prostrate form, holding in his hand a still smoking weapon.

The news spread like wildfire, and old Bill, already wearing on his stern brow the invisible brand of Cain, found himself a prisoner in the only place of detention the village afforded; and it was with a sigh that the township constable, his office thus rescued from immemorial desuetude, turned the wooden button outside the door of his spare bedroom, and left his old neighbor to his gloomy reflections. The next day found him lodged in the county citadel which furnished hospitality to the more serious malefactors.

At first, the dazed man could make no coherent expression, but sat in silent bewilderment, staring sullenly at the old friends who gathered excitedly about, many of whom he had ingloriously worsted in the spring horse trades.

"Ah nevah dône it," was all the reply he vouchsafed to his interlocutors when labored with for some admission of remorse for his crime or to elicit some motive in condonation. It was only when approached by the new parson, an unctuous, funereal-looking individual, whose reputation as a powerful revivalist had created a panic among the chronic recalcitrants, that Bill broke through his stolid indifference and, with an opulence of blasphemy which sent

a shudder along the lanky spine of his would-be confessor, admonished his exit to a region not quotable in select circles. From that moment, the dominie sided with the growing number of Bill's accusers, and such an infallibility attached to the reverend gentleman's conclusions in the minds of his simple parishioners that Bill's case looked more desperate than ever.

The sweet beauty of the day of trial was lost upon the overwrought community. The weather-beaten old fellows went gravely about their morning chores by the light of the paling stars; and, by the time the sun reached his first stadium, the whole countryside wore a deserted aspect, for the entire population had been summoned to appear as witnesses.

The testimony, for the most part reluctantly given, was conclusive and overwhelmingly against the accused; and the young State's attorney wore a look of victory as he summed up, preparatory to the crucial effort of his life.

Slowly but inexorably a chain of indisputable evidence was forged and welded, the alleged motive being the fierce feud, the oft-repeated threat, the petty taunts and the mysterious demise of Bill's prize bull. Even the hallowed story of his boyhood love was rudely haled forth by the relentless genius of the prosecution, and the little court-room was pervaded by a strange solemnity as the tragedy, in suspense for half a generation, approached its climax.

At the conclusion of a brilliant peroration — he was candidate for Congress and hailed the opportunity for a display of his forensic powers to his prospective constituents — and ignoring the fact that old Kenner's sturdy strength had beaten off the destroyer, the young prosecutor clinched his final arguments, demanding the death sentence as a salutary example, and as justified by the enormity of the crime. The jury were visibly impressed by his eloquence, and even the impassive countenance of His Honor was unusually grave while delivering his charge.

It would be difficult to depict the thoughts of the two principals in this strange tragedy, foemen for more than two decades, while the one rested under the stigma of attempted fratricide.

The mind of the prisoner wandered back to their boyhood on the old plantation where, in the anomalous democracy of antebellum days, sprawling in the dirt, they played marbles with the

pickaninnies about the quarters, or hunted with the dogs among the cane-brake and palmettoes of the swamp-lands.

As he mused, the painful present faded from his recollection, his stern countenance was strangely softened, and his heart warmed with a deep yearning toward his accuser, now convalescent and sitting less than six feet away.

Then, rudely recalled to grim realities, came thoughts of the cold prison, the sinister stigma which should stain the family name (they looked at those things so differently north of Mason and Dixon's line), the separation from his wife, the sweetheart of his early manhood and the innocent cause of their estrangement. He drew his breath hard as he mused, and shrunk into an attitude of the deepest dejection.

As for Kenner, he gave no sign of what was passing within, but sat in saturnine silence, apparently absorbed in the solemn measure of the court-room clock as it told off the seconds into eternity, or amused himself with the frantic exercises of a huge bluebottle, dismally audible amid the painful suspense which enchained that primitive audience in a solemn spell.

Twenty minutes slowly dragged along, and still no verdict, though it afterwards leaked out that the jury's disagreement was merely as to the severity of the sentence, some arguing for the death penalty, while two or three held out in extenuation the tragic fate of Bill's bovine.

The suspense was becoming unbearable when a slight stir was heard in the corridor, and the spectators almost ceased breathing when a bailiff approached Bill's lawyer and, after a reverential obeisance to the majesty of the law, whispered excitedly in his ear.

The attorney listened, at first with impatience, then with an aspect of incredulity breaking through the usual professional impassivity.

"May it please the Court to recall the jury?" he said with an air which he vainly endeavored to maintain calm. "I have important testimony to offer for my client!"

The prosecution was on his feet in an instant.

"If your Honor please," he objected, "the State is unalterably opposed to reopening the case on some trivial testimony, as a mere pretext to lighten the just verdict against the prisoner at the bar.

Full opportunity has been afforded the defendant to present his case; in fact, the accused has already enjoyed an unmerited indulgence at the hands of this Court; justice must take its course."

During this harangue, defendant's counsel had remained standing, tense, impatient, yet with a strange expression of triumph on his haggard, unshaven face; for he had never doubted the inevitable doom which awaited his client, and had only fought to mitigate its severity. Yet, when his learned brother ceased speaking, he remained for some moments silent, a far-away look in his eyes, his lips curved into an inscrutable smile.

"Justice is ever willing to give ear to the plea of mercy," the judge replied gravely. "I am sure the learned gentleman would belie the benevolence so strongly limned in his countenance were he to deny to the accused any chance, however faint, for clearing himself of this grave charge. The counsel for the defence will state on what grounds he asks this unusual procedure."

"Your Honor," Mr. Ross began, in tones preternaturally calm; "it is my pleasure to state that the real culprit has confessed, and we are ready to produce him."

The effect of his words was electrical. A cry of gladness broke from the care-spent wife of the prisoner, and she threw herself sobbing into his arms; there was a confused sea of murmurs, and even the judge himself was startled out of professional decorum. In his excitement, 'Lije Godfrey mistook the judicial inkstand for a spittoon, which act of *lèse-majesté* was mercifully overlooked in the general bewilderment.

"Call the jury," was the curt command, and the bailiff disappeared with alacrity, though the excited dignitary failed dismally in his efforts to preserve an imperturbability befitting his office.

With much wonderment depicted on their weary faces, the grave jurymen filed to the places which they had gladly left not thirty minutes before, after the tedious isolation of a fortnight.

"William Brent, junior, take the stand!"

A cry of dismay broke from the unhappy prisoner as young Bill, his handsome face pale but resolute, made his way into the witness's enclosure and awkwardly lifted his hand to be sworn.

"Foh God's sake, Bill, keep yoh mouth shet," he commanded in agonized tones. The son smiled faintly at his sire, but reso-

lutely shook his head, his form heroically erect, his face luminous with a stern resolve. The wretched father broke into a low moan which thrilled the audience with a faint reflection of his pain, all his former stolidity vanishing under the electrifying influence of parental love.

"Yoh Honah," he rose and faced his judge with rugged dignity, "thuh boy's gone clean daft with trubble and shame foh his fathah's meanness. Don't listen to him, jedge."

The Court regarded the pathetic figure pityingly, but shook his head. "Proceed with the witness."

"Jedge, I'll confess!" All the old man's blood was in arms to save his child. "Thuh durned young 'un wants to save the old man's neck, but Ah dun it myself; he had no bizness to shoot my hosses," he gritted out, between his clenched teeth, as the unhappy wife and mother was carried out of the room.

"It's all right, pap," the boy broke in eagerly, his face all aglow. "Yuh needn't lie no mo'. He owned up to me this mawnin'," concluded Bill, turning to the judge. "He's jest outside the do' the'h."

"Abraham Wilcox, take the stand," and a wild, nondescript creature was led into the witness box, mumbling softly to himself, and gazing fearfully about at the little sea of faces.

"What is your name?"

"Silly Abe."

Such a volley of laughter greeted the answer that the bailiff pounded sharply for order.

After ineffectual efforts to administer the usual oath, which his limited wit could not disassociate from blasphemy (Abe had recently got religion), amidst the excited remonstrances of the nonplussed prosecution that his statements were not entitled to credence, Abe was allowed in his rambling manner to make his artless statement. For some time the witness cunningly coquetted with his interlocutor, with the perversity of those of slow reason when snatched into a momentary prominence and discerning the lawyer's anxiety beneath the surface.

Kenner at first viewed the whole proceeding with dazed indifference, then fidgeted nervously in his chair. At length, catching the eye of the idiot gazing fondly at him (he had once thrashed

the neighborhood bully for cruelty to the poor fool), half rising from his chair, he transfixed the witness with his stern gaze.

"Abe, foh the Lawd's sake, foh why did you want to kill yoh Uncle Kennah?"

The witness, affrighted by the unaccustomed sternness of his only friend, began to whimper uneasily, and the truth was soon forthcoming.

It all arose from the annual revival, which, under the jeremiads of Brother Edwards, had shaken even the hardiest with apprehensions. Kenner, among others no less calloused to the brighter side of religion, became inspired with a wholesome dread of future flames under the terrible exhortations to repentance, and for the twenty-fifth time in as many years renounced the adversary of souls, rejoicing in his own great fitness for heaven. The neighborhood wag, in recounting Kenner's powerful "experience" to the veterans at Pierson's, grimly suggested shooting in the interests of his salvation and to forestall his usual post-revival backslidings; and the poor witless one, realizing the grim philosophy without the saving grace of humor, took the suggestion too literally, borrowed Bill's rifle, which absent-mindedly on this one occasion he had left at home, and fled in affright as he realized the consequences of his zeal.

The effect of this artless story was electrical. A thunder of joyful ejaculations burst from the assembly, deafening in its long-pent exuberance the lustily-plied gavel; and the judge, to his secret scandalization, was driven to hide his unprofessional agitation under cover of ostentatious trumpetings within his bandanna, though the charge that he wept remained unproven. The session broke up in great confusion, the jury not even allowed an opportunity to return their verdict; and in his excitement Doug' Grierly swallowed his quid of tobacco, to the dismay of that worthy's thrifty soul, and the consequent great disquieting of his inner man.

"Kennah!"

"Bill, old boy!"

The brothers clasped each other close, their grizzled beards mingled in a tawny mass, and thirty years had slipped backward.

Bill was the first to regain his composure with a loud guffaw, in which his brother presently joined. "Begad, the young ones

have cheated us, brother," he roared in glee, his face glistening like an archangel. Frizzly Bill was much absorbed in whispering consolations into his cousin's ear, but rose to the situation with characteristic aplomb, led the shrinking girl forward, and the pair fell dutifully on their knees. The old fellows stared blankly a moment — then Bill the elder patted the hazel locks of the girl whom he had most unjustly included in his hatred.

"Bring the pa'son," he commanded sententiously, "and let's hev the hull durned bizness ovah at once. And the blawsted eegiot shall be best man, Gawd bless him!"

Bill lost no time in pursuing his momentary advantage. A license was speedily forthcoming and as the sun drooped slowly to the occident, slanting his beams through the dusty panes of that backwoods temple of justice, the little domestic drama drew towards its dénouement.

The lachrymose exhorter was called into requisition, and in consideration of the shin-plaster of liberal denomination bestowed upon him by the grim partisans, magnanimously forgave Bill's spurning of his ghostly ministrations.

"Bill," confessed his brother, when the congratulations were over, "suahly we hev been a couple of dod-durned fools. Of co'se we couldn't both hev Polly; and Ah'm powahful sorry about the bull — "

"Kennah," — the situation was becoming painful to the shy sensibilities of the whilom prisoner, — "yuh hain't got such a thing ez a chaw of long green about yuh, hev ye?" he inquired cautiously.

The fragrant weed was forthcoming, and amid their contented ruminations, the Brent feud passed into history.

At this moment, Old Kelley tottered up to the little domestic group with an air of profound mystery. Grasping their hands in silent sympathy, he gave expression to a significant and comprehensive wink! Then, without a word, judge, jury and advocate, man, woman and child, the crowd melted away in silent procession toward the well-known grotto in the shadow of the limestone hills.

An Official Dispatch.*

BY ANNETTE KITTREDGE.

FTER a social campaign of several months, after a siege of attention from every eligible officer, both military and naval, within a day's journey of "The Harbor," it was observed that the heretofore impenetrable fortress of Miss Mapleson's heart showed signs of weakening.

But, alas! every man cannot win, and it was finally reluctantly conceded that Miss Mapleson's favor shone on two men only — young Commander Gay and Captain Henderson. So the other forces, commanded by officers of greater or less degree, were quietly withdrawn to a point of vantage to watch the tactics of the two remaining besiegers. It was doubly interesting, as they represented the two branches of the service — it was the Army against the Navy.

The chances offered to each were equal, for while Commander Gay's duty aboard the dispatch boat *Walrus* often carried him away from the field of action, Captain Henderson was as often detained at his post, the fortified island in the centre of the harbor.

It was galling to Gay to have to run his boat over to the island and carry back his rival (with others of the garrison) to the scene of strife. But it was no more galling than for Henderson to be detained on the island, while he knew Gay was ashore and carrying on the siege undisturbed.

Thus were affairs when it was rumored that Miss Mapleson was going East. The rumor became a certainty, and the interest of the watchers became intense; the energy of the besieging parties redoubled.

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Finally, a week before Miss Mapleson's departure, and on a night when Henderson was detained on the island, Gay (gloating over the fact), called to find the house of Mapleson in much confusion, owing to the fact that Miss Mapleson's departure had been hastened, and she was to leave the following evening.

"To-morrow night!" exclaimed Gay in gallant despair. "Oh, then, Miss Mapleson, won't you allow me the honor of giving you a dinner aboard the *Walrus* and taking you across the harbor to the station?"

"I think that would be charming, only I fear I must decline the first part," said Miss Mapleson. "You see, I have half accepted an invitation to dinner, and I can't very well get out of it."

"But if you should find that the half-accepted invitation for dinner does not materialize into a full one, may I have that pleasure as well as the trip across the bay?"

Miss Mapleson smiled in a peculiar fashion. "Yes, in that case I shall be delighted to accept." Then she held out a note to Gay.

"I wonder if it would be too much to ask you to drop this at the island on your first trip to-morrow? I'm afraid, if I send it by mail, it will arrive too late."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure, Miss Mapleson," and Gay said it in a tone of voice that implied a willingness to start the *Walrus* for the Pole that night if Miss Mapleson desired it.

As Gay threw his coat over a chair that night, the note — an innocent enough bit of paper — fell from his pocket, and, as he picked it up, he read the address of Captain Henderson.

Then did that innocent looking note belie its appearance, and begin its disastrous work. Its pale, meek face bore the name of Gay's hated rival, its heart contained a message for him — evil thought — undoubtedly about that dinner Miss Mapleson spoke of, Henderson's last chance! Thus spoke the note to Gay's jealousy-tainted mind. Except for its message, Henderson would probably remain unaware of Miss Mapleson's departure until too late. Mean, villainously mean thoughts did that note suggest to the infatuated Gay.

At last he slipped it back into his pocket, and turned out the light.

"Of course, I am absent-minded, and then again, I would never

think of wearing that coat in the morning," murmured Gay, as he "turned in."

The next morning found the besieged garrison rather uneasy, a state of feeling not unnatural to a garrison that is about to capitulate, but is not quite positive to which force. However, Miss Mapleson had (almost unknown to herself) decided that the Army should determine the terms of surrender. But eleven o'clock came, and there was no signal — no flag of truce from the enemy. Twelve o'clock — one — and the Army was still silent. At two, Miss Mapleson began to realize how much she had longed for that message; and at three, somewhat frightened at her own feelings, and determined to prove to herself that she really did not care, she sent a note to Commander Gay stating that "she found with pleasure that she could accept his invitation for dinner." And the Navy beamed with delight.

The second and last trip of the *Walrus* was made to the island at five, and Gay's outrageously hardened conscience never gave him a pang as he gazed at the blue-coated figure of Captain Henderson on the wharf. The Captain had expected a note from Miss Mapleson setting the time for his dinner that evening, and no excuse that he made to himself could satisfactorily explain that young lady's silence. If Gay's heart could have been softened, the Captain's dejected attitude would have done it, but instead, the picture of the defeated foe seemed to inspire him with a fiendish cruelty, and waiting for the boat to get just out of reach, he called:

"Hard luck that you can't see Miss Mapleson before she goes to-night."

"What?" shouted the astonished Henderson, thinking he had not heard aright.

"I say Miss Mapleson is going to-night — ten forty — Santa Fé."

"For Heaven's sake come back here," Henderson shouted.

But Gay only smiled sweetly. Then he delivered his parting shot — it was mean, he knew it — but he just couldn't help it:

"She's coming aboard the *Walrus* for dinner," he called through his hands, and left Captain Henderson acting like a man on wires, and shouting indistinguishable language that had the general sound of being rather strong. "All's fair in love or war," quoth Gay as he went below to dress for dinner.

Unfortunately, the dinner was not the success he had expected, for, delightful host that he was, and presiding over a delicious and charmingly served meal, he was unable to arouse Miss Mapleson, who was sadly distrait, and the conversation was chiefly carried on by Gay and the chaperon — a not very enlivening process, when one does not care for the chaperon.

Gay struggled manfully, however, and was just bending forward to pay Miss Mapleson a most impressive compliment, when an orderly entered the cabin with a dispatch. As Gay read it, his face underwent the most alarming changes — his eyes fairly popped from his head — his face, at first ashen, suddenly turned a deep purple, and finally, choking with unsuppressible emotions, he hurriedly excused himself and rushed on deck.

In his excitement Gay had thrown the dispatch, face upward, on the table, and Miss Mapleson read the following official message:

> The cow has fallen off the island. Come immediately.
>
> COLONEL SHAKSPEARE.

For one minute the women looked at each other, and then shrieked with laughter. The sounds reached the ears of Commander Gay, and he ground his teeth in helpless rage.

"Oh! if the message hadn't been from his superior officer! If only he could have had time to steam back and land his guests! That his dinner for Miss Mapleson should be interrupted, ruined, for the sake of a govermental cow that had fallen overboard — aw-r-r-r-r!" Gay stamped the deck and muttered incoherently; and all the time they were steaming rapidly toward the little island in the centre of the bay.

"But I don't understand," gasped the chaperon, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Is it a very valuable cow?"

"Very," sighed Miss Mapleson, weak from mirth. "The fortifications and embankments are so steep that they can't use a lawn-mower, and hence the cow! and — and — it's become quite a pet and — oh dear! — and evidently it's fallen off one — one of the steep side — hi-hi-hills, oh! —" and off they went into peal after peal of uncontrollable laughter.

As they approached the island, they saw the poor animal in the

water, kept afloat by two soldiers in a small boat stationed to support her head. And then, a little nearer, and the stalwart form of Captain Henderson was discernible on the wharf.

"Glad you've come, Gay. Get the poor brute out as soon as you can, will you?" said Henderson cheerfully as he came on deck. Gay was incapable of a reply permissible in addressing a brother officer.

As Gay worked to land the animated lawn-mower, his rival again stormed the much weakened garrison. A few stern questions, promptly answered, proved conclusively that the dispatch of war had been tampered with, and this point settled, the storming party went on to sketch the terms of surrender in such a pleading manner, putting it, in fact, in such an altogether charming light, that the garrison sweetly and gently capitulated, and there was peace.

So taken up were they with more important subjects that neither the victor nor the captive thought to ask Gay about the note, and his elaborately prepared explanation was not even called for.

"I'm going over to the station with you, Gay," said Henderson, slapping the sullen Commander on the shoulder. "And, I say, old chap, you don't mind, do you, but, *entre nous*, you know, I shoved the cow off the island myself."

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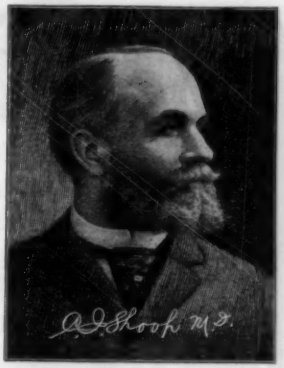

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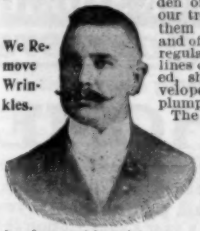

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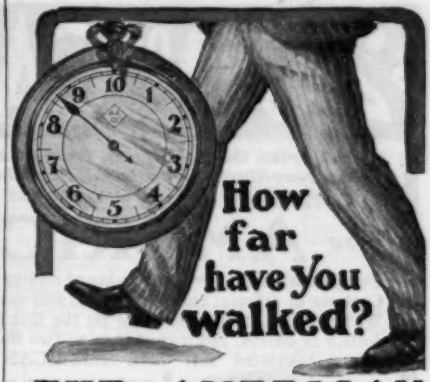

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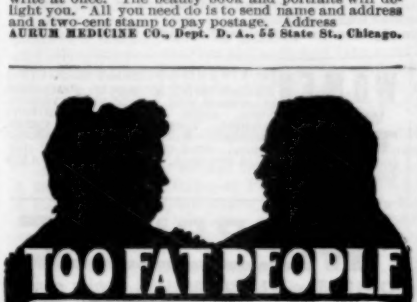

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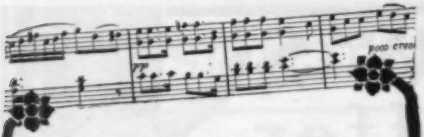

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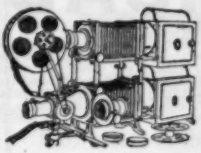

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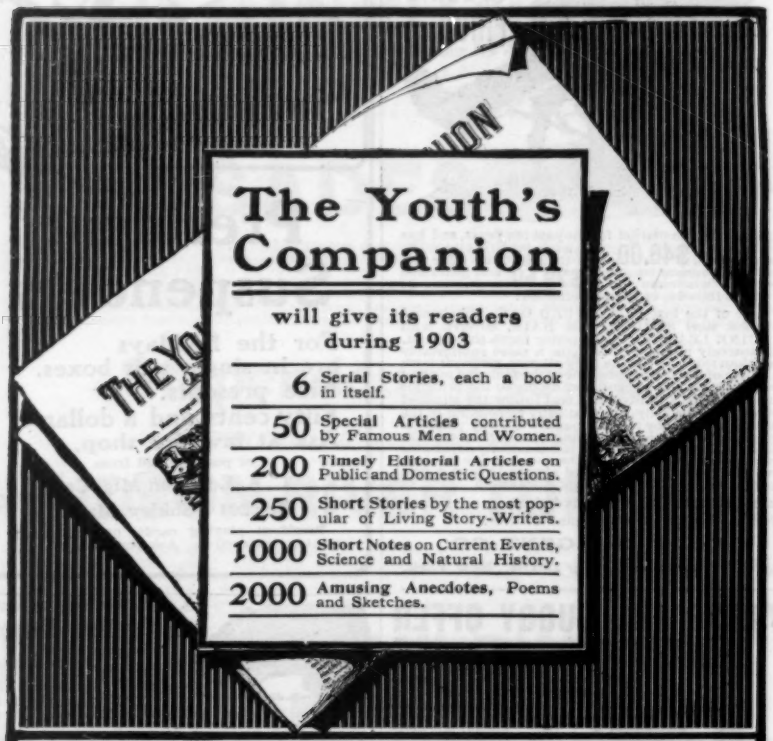
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